

Procedure for Dealing with Complaints by Applicants

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Imperial College's mission is to maintain excellent standards of achievement in teaching and research and to attract and admit students of the highest calibre. Its international reputation relies on the people who make up its diverse and high-achieving community. Selection for entry is based on consideration of academic ability, motivation for study, interest in the subject area and the potential to benefit from the experience and to contribute to College life. The College receives a very large number of applications for every place and, as entry is so competitive, is unable to make every applicant an offer. The College strives to achieve a standard of overall administrative performance, in terms of service quality and operating efficiency, which complements and reinforces the excellence of its teaching and research. The College recognises, however, that, if applicants consider they have grounds for complaint about either academic or administrative services, a clear, consistent procedure should be available through which these complaints can be investigated and considered.

2. Scope of Complaints

- 2.1. The academic opinion or professional judgment of those evaluating or making a decision on an application may not be challenged and is thus regarded as outside the scope of this complaints procedure.
- 2.2. Applicants may complain if they are dissatisfied with the processing of their application where:
- a) There is new material information (for example mitigating circumstances), which may have affected a decision on the application either at the point of the original decision or at confirmation when examination results are known. However, mitigating circumstances must be submitted by the relevant published deadline in order for these to be considered, as it may not be possible to amend the decision on an application where these are submitted late. Where an applicant is providing new material information after the outcome of an application, it is also expected that the applicant must provide accepted reasons as to why that information was not made available at the time of the application.
 - b) An offer of admission is believed to be incompatible with the typical, or range of typical offers made by the admitting department within that admissions cycle.
 - c) There was some procedural irregularity in the way in which an application was handled by the College.
 - d) There is evidence of bias or prejudice.

3. Timing of Complaints

- 3.1. Complaints should be raised during the admissions cycle to which the complaint refers and within a reasonable timeframe, as outlined in section 4.4. Complaints made outside of this period may, in exceptional circumstances be considered at the discretion of the Academic Registrar.

4. Stages of the Complaints Procedure

- 4.1. There are two stages in the Complaints Procedure:

- a) **Stage One:** The complaint is referred to the relevant responsible authority, as specified in Paragraph 4.6.1.
- b) **Stage Two:** The complaint is referred to the Academic Registrar who will investigate the complaint and propose its resolution in consultation with the responsible authority.

- 4.2. It is envisaged that most complaints will be satisfactorily resolved at the first stage of the procedure, but the second stage is provided where this proves not to be possible.

- 4.3. Complainants are invited, from the outset of their action, to indicate what, if any, specific form of redress they are seeking, without prejudice to any final remedy which may be determined. Applicants are reminded that an informal resolution to their complaint is possible at any stage.

- 4.4. It is expected that complaints will be raised as quickly as possible. Where a complaint relates to a specific event, it should be raised with the individual concerned within 10 days of that event.

- 4.5. The responsible authority for the relevant stage of the complaint will aim to provide a written response within 10 working days where possible. Depending on the nature of the complaint and the circumstances to be investigated, response times at each stage may take longer than 10 working days.

4.6. Stage One

- 4.6.1. It is expected that, initially, every reasonable attempt will be made by the complainant to raise the complaint with the responsible individual, and that the responsible individual will make every reasonable attempt to resolve the complaint. If the complaint cannot be satisfactorily resolved, it should be referred to the next level of responsible authority. The responsible authority is determined by the subject of the complaint.

- a) Academic Department admissions matters (i.e. the decision making process): the complaint should be submitted to the appropriate Head of Department.
- b) Registry admissions matters (i.e. the administrative processing of the application): the complaint should be submitted to the Director of

Admissions and Student Support (Financial and International) or the Head of Admissions.

4.6.2. Fee payment matters, the complaint should be submitted to the Director of Admissions and Student Support (Financial and International) or the Head of Admissions. With regard to academic matters, if the responsible individual is a Head of Department, or the complainant feels that it would not be beneficial for an attempt to resolve the complaint within the Department the complaint may be submitted to a College Tutor. With regard to Registry admissions and fee payment matters if the responsible individual is the Director of Admissions and Student Support (Financial and International) or the Head of Admissions and the complainant feels that it would not be beneficial for an attempt to resolve the complaint within the Admissions Section, the complaint may be submitted to the Deputy Academic Registrar.

4.6.3. The responsible authority will investigate the complaint. Applicants can expect a response within the periods outlined in section 4.5. Once a response has been provided under stage one of the complaints procedure, that will conclude that part of the complaints process. As such, if an applicant is still unsatisfied with the response under stage one and feel that their complaint has not been adequately addressed, investigated or resolved, it is the responsibility of the applicant to raise their complaint under stage two of the process to the relevant authority (see section 4.6.1).

4.7. Stage Two

4.7.1. Where the complaint is not resolved at the first stage, the Academic Registrar, in conjunction with the Deputy Academic Registrar and the Director of Student Services will investigate the complaint and seek to bring it to resolution. At this stage, the complainant is required to provide written details of the complaint in the form of a letter to the Academic Registrar. A written reply will be given within 10 working days where possible, of the complaint being raised at the second stage. This may or may not be the final response from the Academic Registrar, depending on the level of investigation required. The Academic Registrar may choose to meet with the complainant, the responsible individual and the responsible authority before attempting to conclude the matter. The applicant's letter of complaint and the Academic Registrar's response will be kept on record.

5. PRINCIPLES OF THE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

5.1. It is the intention of the College that no applicant should be discriminated against or in any way penalised for raising a complaint at any level of the Complaints Procedure.

5.2. The applicant will be kept informed of the progress of the complaint and any unforeseen delays will be communicated.

5.3. At all stages of the process, when a complaint is not upheld, reasons shall be given to the applicant.

- 5.4. Where a complaint is upheld as valid, any remedial action will be taken, and the complainant will be informed by the Academic Registrar. If appropriate, any incidental expenses incurred by the complainant will be reimbursed.
- 5.5. In keeping with the Human Rights Act 1998, should the applicant wish, details of the final outcome of a complaint will be posted on the relevant departmental noticeboard.
- 5.6. The Academic Registrar shall prepare each year a report on the complaints brought to Stage Two of the Procedure, using the information arising from complaints which will be filed within the Registry. In doing so, the confidentiality of individuals will be preserved. The report shall be presented to the College's Senate.
- 5.7. The College recognises the rights of individuals who may be wrongly accused in the circumstances of a complaint. In the case of a complaint by a current student applying for another programme, where it is found that they have raised a frivolous or vexatious complaint or used false information, the College may use its Disciplinary Procedure or take appropriate action under the Applicant Conduct principles in respect of the student or applicant's conduct.
- 5.8. A complaint submitted by a third party on behalf of another may in exceptional circumstances be considered by the Academic Registrar.

6. CONDUCT OF THE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

- 6.1. Applicants seeking authoritative guidance concerning the applicability and operation of the Procedure should apply to the Academic Registrar. Where appropriate, members of the College will facilitate access to information and documents material to a complaint, whilst having due regard for privacy, confidentiality and the reasonable interests of other applicants and any third parties. Where any meeting is held at which the complainant will be present, he or she is entitled to be accompanied by a 'friend' (this may be a parent, teacher or other representative, but should not be a legal advisor acting in a professional capacity).

Approved by Registry

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